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ABSTRACT

The North Carolina Outward Bound School uses the Principle-Process Course Design Model as a clear and logical structure for designing wilderness courses. The model begins by establishing the key processes that sequentially structure all wilderness courses and then defines their function within the structure of the school's organizational mission. These key processes are: (1) principles (foundational pillars of self-reliance, physical fitness, craftsmanship, and compassion); (2) people (working relationship between the course director, instructors, and students); (3) place (expedition planning to serve the purpose of fulfilling the guiding principles for the benefit of the people involved); (4) program (course curricula); and (5) performance (evaluation of the course effectiveness in establishing the guiding principles and bringing the stated mission to fruition for the people served). The Course Progression Methodology at the school is a sequential process that addresses both individual and group development as the participants move from fear of the unknown toward personal power and performance. The stages of development in this progression are identity, connectedness, competence, purpose, and power. This delivery structure is simple to understand, creates a common language and direction for the school, and serves as a basis for operations and staff development. (SV)

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# The North Carolina Outward Bound School Program Delivery Structure

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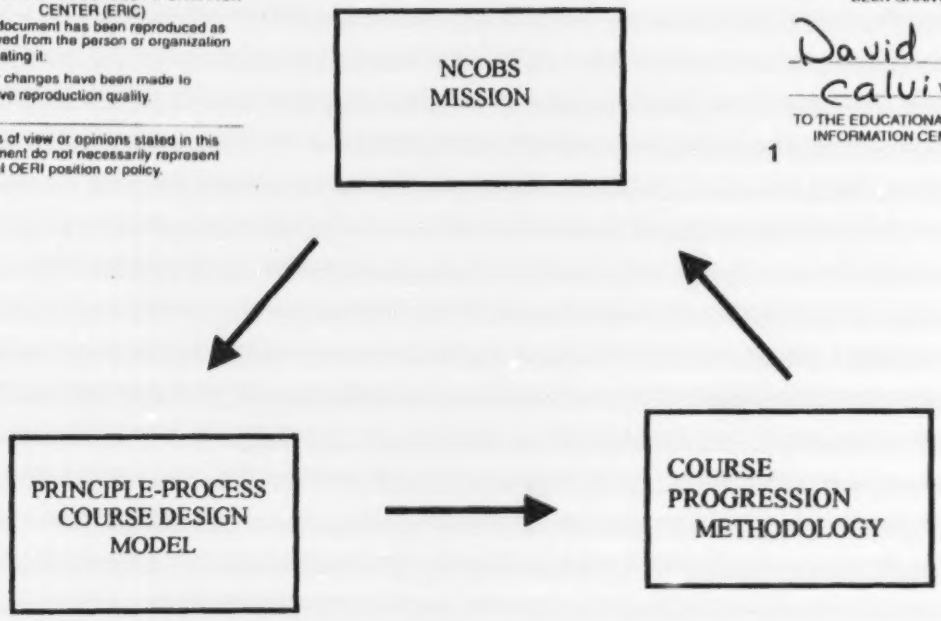


## Introduction

The mission statement of North Carolina Outward Bound School (NCOBS) states that, as an organization we are assigned with the task of delivering a safe, adventure-based learning experience that is challenging, affirming and significant. It goes on to state that these experiences will then result in personal growth, self-reliance, compassion, a commitment to serve, moral courage and respect for the environment.

There is little debate that NCOBS in its' 35 year history has attempted to deliver courses that on some level meets these ambitious expectations. The question of consistency, however, has had our organization in dialogue about whether we can honestly say that every course is in line with our stated mission. In order to establish such consistency with regards to program delivery, it was determined that a clear delivery structure be created to support the desired end-results of our mission.

## Principle-Process Course Design Model

The Principle-Process Course Design Model is a clear and logical structure for designing wilderness courses. This model begins by establishing the "key processes" that sequentially structure all wilderness courses and then defines their function within the

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structure of our organizational mission. These key processes are known as the **5 P's** and are set in order in the following sequence:

1) **Principles**
2) **People**
3) **Place**
4) **Program**
5) **Performance**

Operationally, this model is used most effectively in pre-course planning to structure the course design for both the course director and the instructors. This model insures that the key elements of a wilderness course are logically being cared for and that a principle-based performance will be the end result.

**Principles.** The first key design element that is put in place is a set of guiding principles that will become the "rule of conduct" and the fundamental truths that the course will operate under. They provide the "true north" direction that will be constantly referred to, defined and evaluated. Instructors design the course so that they "language" these principles and have them become a part of the course vocabulary.

The guiding principles that have successfully regulated NCOBS through its' history is the four pillars: **Self-Reliance, Physical Fitness, Craftsmanship and Compassion.** It is a testament to their longevity and strength of purpose that anyone associated with NCOBS, when asked, would be able to recite them. What is critical for this model's success has been to bring these pillars, plus the addition of **Wilderness** and **Leadership,** into the forefront of the curriculum and structure them as the guiding principles of all wilderness course designs. What is important from an instructional standpoint during pre-course activities is arriving at a common understanding of each principle. Once that common ground has been reached these principles serve as the driving force with regards to the course design, the relationships that are built around them and the performance levels that are reached on course.

**People.** Although it is acknowledged that there are many individuals involved with the delivery of a course, the course director, instructors and students are the key individuals to design the course. It is during this process where a working relationship is set up between all three. Understanding the others' roles in the process of designing a thoughtful principle-based course sets up this relationship. It is also here that instructors begin viewing themselves and the crew as a learning community.

**Course Director.** Course directors serve to set-up the operational structures that allow the instructors to establish their working relationship around the guiding principles. They act as a supervisor and guide in keeping the instructors mindful of the principle-process model and the "big picture." Directors also serve as the critical eye regarding the evaluation of overall performance levels of instructors and crew.

**Instructors**. Key to the success of any course is the working relationship among instructors. From a principle-process course design model this means that the instructors initially establish their relationship around the six guiding principles. This provides a common ground for the instructors to begin designing a course that will establish some structural norms and language that will be modeled to the students.

**Students.** After the instructors establish their working relationship, the next step in the "people" process is to begin studying the profile of the crew. There is much information that is available that will help guide the creation of an appropriate course through careful review of the make-up of the students. How to design a course around a set of guiding principles is different for juniors, youth and adults. It also can vary from individual to individual. That is why it is critical to spend time really studying your audience and its' diversity.

**Place.** With the establishment of clear working relationships and the profile of the population determined, the next order of things is to structure a thoughtful expedition. It has been important that the expedition serve the purpose of fulfilling the guiding principles and the people served, not the other way around. A well-designed expedition should not only be evaluated on where a crew goes, but also the manner in which they get there and what they learn along the way.

It is during this process that instructors map out not only the destinations, but also establish a safe learning culture that will be a stage where the guiding- principles can be played out. This is where consistent referencing to the principles allows students to rally around a set of structural norms that gives an educational purpose to the oftentimes-perceived adversity of expeditioning.

**Program.** Once the course design has established parameters for creating a safe learning environment, instructors can then begin designing a curriculum driven program. It is here that instructors create dynamic lesson plans for each course component that focuses on various learning styles and mastery of skills.

Established course curriculums become the vehicle that drives the guiding principles. There is also an established methodology that structures the delivery of the lesson plans to insure that skills are being assessed and evaluated along the lines of a natural learning progression.

**Performance.** This is the final key process where the principle-process course design model comes full circle. From both an operational and program delivery standpoint this is where a determination is made on the effectiveness of the course in establishing the guiding principles and also bringing the stated mission to fruition for the crew.

A critical component to this design process has been creating effective evaluation criteria that clearly target the desired end-results. These performance-based evaluations have allowed for a dynamic process in which assessments are made in a timely manner and adjustments are made accordingly both during the course and after.

The overall course design should lay the groundwork that builds on both personal and technical skills. It is important to note that performance is an expectation for every course at NCOBS. With the guiding-principles grounding the course design process, the intentional outcome is that a principle-based performance should always become the "norm" both for the instructional team and the students.

### Course Progression Methodology

The Course Progression Methodology at NCOBS is a sequential process that addresses both the individual and group development of a crew as they move from fear and anxiety of the unknown towards personal power and performance (Training – Main – Final).

It is during this process of the program delivery structure where the educational structures that were established during the course design are set in motion. At the center of the teaching are the guiding principles.

What has been key to the success of this educational progression is that instructors do not remove themselves from the learning process. As students are developing and asking themselves the critical questions of individual development so are the instructors, creating a truly dynamic learning community. Training in this methodology has allowed instructors to be mindful of the indisputable laws that govern how individuals /groups develop and learn on a course. It also has assisted in building instructor judgment by establishing a clearer understanding of the connection between what is happening on a course and how it happens. **(See table of Course Progression Methodology).**

## Course Progression Methodology

| **Stages of Individual Development** | Critical Questions | **Stages of Group Development** | **Outcomes** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Identity | Who am I? | Norming | **Setting of static and dynamic norm structures. Set high expectations.** Training Expedition |
| 2) Connectedness | Do I Belong? | Forming | Establishing relationships based on support. Begin developing a safe place for learning. **Training Expedition** |
| 3) Competence | Am I worthy? | Forming | Expanding skill base. Addressing learning styles and teaching for "mastery". **Main Expedition** |
| 4) Purpose | Why am I here? | Storming | Re-visiting principles established with dynamic norms. Re-affirming commitment and expectations. **Main Expedition** |
| 5) Power | Does what I say or do have any significance? | Performing | Through a continuous process of building on principles, support, engaged learning and pushing past conflict, a level of power and self-reliance is obtained for both the individual and the group. **Final Expedition** |

**Outcomes**

Throughout the history of NCOBS, wilderness courses have gone through many evolutions. The basic key processes that underlie their design, however, have remained the same. What makes this delivery structure unique is it brings to the surface a structure that is simple for everyone, from logistics to field staff, to comprehend. It has created a common language and direction for the entire school. It has illustrated the need for changes in an institution that was experiencing some stagnation with regards to program delivery. It has enabled the organization to remove antiquated policies and procedures, replacing them with operational structures that support staff development and retention. Other key outcomes have been:

- This structure has set clear program norms for both field staff and logistics with regards to pre-course efficiency. It has created an atmosphere where course design expectations are to be both intentional and educational. The norm is that an instructors' performance evaluation begins at pre-course, not at course start.
- High quality trainings have been developed focusing on course design and methodology. This has raised the standard for more seasoned staff as trainers and mentors to new staff.
- Individual Development Plans for field instructors have allowed staff to direct their own development in areas such as; Leadership, course design, teaching presentations, technical skills, professionalism and risk management.
- Base camp operations have become more systematic with regards to course planning. Logistics and programming are coordinating efforts to insure that instructor's time is used efficiently with regards to creating quality course designs.
- Everyone from the Executive Director to Course Directors has participated in supervisory trainings that focus on staff development and retention. A by-product of this is that the school is beginning to experience a more stable leadership structure, which will in time positively effect the retention of our skilled field staff.
- NCOBS has become a safe place to learn new skills for both the students and staff. Many innovative principle-based lesson plans and course designs have already been developed in the field.

**Reflections**

In the two years since this program delivery structure has been implemented it has clearly created a stronger culture among our staff with regards to their responsibility as outdoor educators. What has made the NCOBS program delivery structure so innovative is that it has taken the complexities of running a wilderness school and reduced it into its' most simplest of terms. The principle-based course design (5p's) could be introduced to any OB school or wilderness school because the key processes we all share. The Course Progression Methodology is based on indisputable laws of both individual and group development that are universally accepted by most outdoor educators. It is not that any of this structure is that radically new. What is new and worth sharing, however, is NCOBS commitment to its guiding principles and systematically structuring the delivery of our programs around them in fulfilling the mission of our school.

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